



## Position Paper of the Rural Pact Coordination Group on Recent Legislative Developments

May 2026



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The Rural Pact Coordination Group (RPCG) – set up to steer the process of the Rural Pact contributing to the Long-term vision for rural areas (LTVRA) - plays a central role in articulating shared priorities and ensuring that the challenges and opportunities of rural territories are effectively reflected in EU policies and funding instruments.

One year after the adoption of the RPCG Declaration in December 2024 — which underscored the critical importance of targeted policy intervention, innovation and adequate resourcing to address depopulation, economic decline and the green and digital transitions in rural regions — **this Position Paper assesses the extent to which those commitments are being reflected in the emerging framework for the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**. It also reflects on recent political developments and puts forward concrete and practical proposals on how to better integrate the provisions of the Declaration in the future MFF.



## I. Acknowledging the value of an integrated single-fund approach and flexibility

- > The RPCG acknowledges the efforts of the EU legislators to introduce a single-fund and integrated approach in the post-2027 MFF, which has the potential - when combined with adequate earmarking - to ensure that rural areas benefit from multiple funding sources in a coherent and complementary manner. This approach also opens up the possibility for the needs of rural communities to be more systematically integrated into the cohesion policy logic, in line with the territorial cohesion objectives set out in Article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).
- > The RPCG further **acknowledges the flexibility granted to Member States** to adapt programmes to their specific national and territorial contexts, provided (1) this flexibility is exercised within a common EU framework that clearly reflects shared priorities, including mandatory support for rural areas and communities; and (2) this flexibility does not translate into excessive centralisation at the national level, but rather support the devolution of responsibilities in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, empowering regions and local public authorities.
- > Furthermore, the **RPCG positively notes the increased use of simplified cost options and performance-based funding**, which are particularly important for reducing administrative burden and access to funds for local, small-scale and place-based development approaches, including LEADER/CLLD and other community-led and territorial cooperation initiatives, such as smart villages.

## II. Need for dedicated and visible rural support beyond agriculture

- > The RPCG **reaffirms the need for more focused and dedicated funding for rural priorities, communities and citizens** in the post-2027 MFF, aligned with the LTVRA<sup>1</sup>. While agriculture remains a cornerstone of rural economies and food security, nearly 90% of residents in predominantly rural regions work outside agriculture. Rural development policy must therefore address the broader social, economic and territorial realities of rural life.

- > **EU policies – especially cohesion policy – and supporting EU funds<sup>2</sup> must guarantee the right to stay also for rural citizens** (farmers and non-farmers alike) by **ensuring effective and clearly differentiated non-agricultural rural support**, including access to quality services (such as education, health, housing and mobility), connectivity, renewable energy, local entrepreneurship, culture and territorial competitiveness<sup>3</sup>.

## III. Ensuring proportionate and fair share of EU funds for rural citizens to support the 'right to stay'

- > While the RPCG welcomes the renewed political recognition of rural areas, including recent statements highlighting the importance of rural funding envelopes, **the currently proposed allocation and definition of rural areas remain insufficient**. More than 30% of Europeans live in rural areas, often facing structural disadvantages.
- > To respect the cohesion objective and diversity of (rural) areas enshrined in Article 174 of TFEU<sup>4</sup>, **no less than a share of EU funds (beyond support to the farming/ agricultural sector) that is proportionate to the share of citizens living in rural communities should support citizens** in rural areas in a horizontal way (i.e. through multiple and integrated policies and funds). This target is realistic under the proposed integrated approach, provided that improved local territorial tagging mechanisms are applied<sup>5</sup>.
- > Overall, support for rural areas and communities should be more clearly and systematically **integrated within the EU's cohesion policy framework**. Rural development support – with focus on place-based approaches - should also be clearly integrated in the future Regulation establishing the European Fund for Regional Development<sup>6</sup>.

## IV. Mandatory allocation to community-led place-based approaches

- > To fully realise the potential of community-led, place-based and participatory approaches, the NRP Plan support should include **earmarked funding for LEADER/CLLD and rural communities with locally led, integrated strategies ('smart villages')** within the funding for rural areas and development.

<sup>1</sup> See proposed amendments to Articles 2, 3 & 22 of the Draft MFF Regulation.

<sup>2</sup> In particular those funding NRPPs and the European Competitiveness Fund.

<sup>3</sup> See proposed amendments to Preamble Point 44, Articles 22 & 35.

<sup>4</sup> "Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions with very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions." (Article 174 TFEU)

<sup>5</sup> See also point 6; and proposed amendments under Article 10 & 22.

<sup>6</sup> The RPCG is ready to provide specific amendments to the EFRD Regulation, including those by ELARD and SVNS.

> In this context, **the RPCG calls for the integration of the proposals developed by** RPCG member organisations, particularly those developed by **ELARD<sup>7</sup> and the Smart Village Network Services<sup>8</sup>** - both of which have already been endorsed by the RPCG — into the new MFF Regulation.

## V. Strengthened rural proofing and partnership principle

> The future MFF legislative framework **should also strengthen rural proofing and the effective involvement of rural partners within the NRP partnership principle**, including the ongoing negotiations of the future MFF. This requires the explicit recognition and systematic engagement of a broad range of rural actors - including LEADER Local Action Groups, rural community representatives and civil society<sup>9</sup> - through multi-level governance arrangements and the Rural Pact model<sup>10</sup>.

## VI. A functional and effective 'rural' definition and monitoring system

> **A clear and functional definition of rural areas and communities is essential for effective policy design and monitoring.** NUTS3-level categorisation often conceals significant intra-regional disparities between urban, peri-urban and rural territories. At the same time, approximately 79% of cohesion funding currently lacks territorial tagging, making it difficult to assess the extent to which EU funds reach rural areas and communities.

> **The RPCG therefore calls for clearer minimum requirements for defining "rural areas", "rural communities" and "rural development support" at the local level**, building on the existing DEGURBA classification of local administrative units (LAU) - rural and sub-urban/town<sup>11</sup>, allowing sufficient flexibility to reflect Member State and regional contexts. To support this process, a dedicated stakeholder working group should be established within the RPCG to contribute to the future definition and operationalisation of the concept of "rural".

The RPCG stands ready to engage constructively with EU institutions and Member States to ensure that the post-2027 MFF translates these principles into a coherent, place-based and adequately resourced framework that genuinely strengthens territorial cohesion and delivers tangible benefits for rural areas and communities.

**This Position Paper was adopted by the Rural Pact Coordination Group (RPCG) pursuant to its Terms of Reference.**

17 members voted (82% in favour, 18% abstained, no objections).

The following comments have been requested to be added by members:

- To strengthen the proposed earmarking for community-led, place-based approaches, PREPARE recommends explicitly including broader community-led innovation models beyond LEADER/CLLD and Smart Villages, enabling tailored support for diverse rural actors (communities, LAGs, SMEs, associations) through simplified, results-based innovation funding.

- Rural Youth Europe: A specific, ring-fenced share of the rural allocation dedicated to rural youth is requested by Rural Youth Europe. Youth-led and youth-focused measures must be explicitly included in rural funding priorities. Youth organisations must be formal partners in the governance, design, and monitoring of NRP Plans. Territorial and youth-specific data must be tracked in EU funds.

<sup>7</sup> See proposed amendments under Articles 4, 22, 35, 76 and 77.

<sup>8</sup> See proposed amendments under in Explanatory Memorandum Title IX, Articles 63 & 74, and new 'Article 7X'.

<sup>9</sup> Rural youth represented across these as far as possible and relevant 'youth check' mechanisms introduced.

<sup>10</sup> See proposed amendments under Articles 6 & 7.

<sup>11</sup> See proposed amendments under Articles 4 and 63.



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The opinions expressed are those of the Rural Pact Coordination Group only and should not be considered as representative of the European Commission's official position.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2026

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The Rural Pact Support Office is a project implemented by



PRINT ISBN 978-92-68-39933-0 doi:10.2762/7193751 KF-01-26-037-EN-C

PDF ISBN 978-92-68-39932-3 doi:10.2762/2342453 KF-01-26-037-EN-N



Funded by  
the European Union